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ABSTRACT

In today's world, technology, bureaucracy, and budgetary matters often create an impersonal, stressful situation for career practitioners. Practitioners wonder if there is ever enough time to establish the empathetic, congruent relationship that is necessary to be helpful with clients. This paper suggests adding a level of interpretative analysis to the trait-factor assessment process by including dramaturgical based techniques to incorporate narrative analysis in the process. This paper describes how dramaturgical analysis revises familiar concepts of personal identity and socialization and suggests a simple method for incorporating dramaturgical analysis into the career counseling process by using job interview questions to generate written and oral narratives. (Contains 15 references.) (GCP)

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Narrative Journal: Blending Old Theories With New Techniques

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Narrative Journal: Blending Old Theories with New Techniques.

Lee Walker Hirschbein

"The song was created long ago when our language was different from what it is now. Today, our people do not use such words in common speech. Indeed, no one knows the exact meaning of the wonderful words. The song is still sung in some of the medicine ceremonies, but only the Medicine Men, the Holy Men, understand its meaning."

Clark Edmonds (1989, p.265)

Introduction

In today's world, technology, bureaucracy, and budgetary matters often create an impersonal, stressful situation for career practitioners. As the bottom line looms before us in bright red, we are faced with the demand that we do more with less which makes it easy to stress. We wonder if there is ever enough time to establish the empathetic, congruent relationship that we know is necessary for us to be helpful with the people who make up our growing caseload. Unfortunately, the individuals who present their unique situations to us are often reduced to spreadsheets and time segments as we walk the tightrope between meeting specific guidelines and finding a way to look each client in the eye and engage in a meaningful relationship that is sensitive to important cultural and gender issues. At times, it seems that standard trait-factor style assessments are necessary but not sufficient for evaluating people who come to us for help with momentous lifestyle decisions.

This paper suggests adding a level of interpretative analysis to the trait-factor assessment process by including dramaturgical based techniques to incorporate narrative analysis in the process. The dramaturgical-perspective is a branch of social psychology that was explored by Kenneth Burke in the 1930's and elaborated on by Hugh Duncan, Erving Goffman and others. A basic precept of this theory is that analysis of human behavior can only be accomplished as social interactions are

studied in an inclusive manner. It steps away from deductive analysis as it actively engages individuals in communicating their life stories for evaluation. And, it makes use of observation in a manner that goes beyond the "fly on the wall" metaphor to engage the observer in the interaction. Dramaturgical theory is like a wide-range lens because it derives meaning from an entire spectrum of behaviors that result from social interaction. It is an important lifestyle assessment method because:

- It is suitable for women and individuals from diverse cultures who are not adequately served by standardized, time sensitive, mainstream focused, language specific assessments.
- It helps people discover a sense of personal history that extends from the past to the future revealing important life patterns. Positive patterns can be reinforced and expanded on for future growth.
- It encourages clients to become more independent by teaching them basic skills and knowledge that can be used to confront career and lifestyle issues they might face in the future.
- The multi-tasking feature of this approach offers an efficient method for accomplishing more during these lean times when many of us are faced with mandates to accomplish more with fewer resources.

Hansen (1997) asked, "What do we need to know and do to add to our theories, strategies, and interventions to help individuals and families make more effective life planning decisions?" This article is intended for those of us who ponder her inspirational question. It may be of special interest to career counselors, career development facilitators and other individuals who are working in the field of career and life planning. It is also useful for educators and students in sociology, psychology and education who would like to learn more about incorporating qualitative techniques into research methodology.

In the first part of this paper I will describe how dramaturgical analysis revises familiar concepts of personal identity and socialization. Next, relying on the theories of Donald Super and Sunny Hansen, I will suggest a simple method for incorporating dramaturgical analysis into the career counseling process by using job interview questions to generate written and oral narratives.

Personal Identity Characteristics

According to Mark Currie (1998 p.17), we do not have a personal identity inside of us. Our identities exist only as narratives, and if we wish to discover who we are, we must tell our story. This is a common thesis of dramaturgical theorists who insist that individuals do not contain a

mysterious collection of innate traits that follow them through life. Instead, people are defined in terms of the meaning they create while engaging in day to day activities with others. As individuals create significance through interaction, they become engaged in various combinations of roles that add definition and meaning to their lives. These roles are not fixed, but as Donald Super suggests, "wax and wane" as lifestyle concerns shift and recycle.

The concept of a personality that moves with a person and drives need- related behavior is not a valid construct in dramaturgical analysis. This is because personality, as used in this manner, is an innate, internal artifact that acts to generate specific actions in the external world. Instead of personality, the term *SELF* is advanced as an appropriate term for personal identity. The concept, *SELF* implies a reactive, flowing entity that is established, destroyed and recreated through social interaction. Relying on social interaction to establish the concept of *SELF* may cause discomfort for some because is not possible to establish a predictable, unchanging outcome that endures over time. But, as Donald Super so aptly points out, the roles that people engage in over a lifespan are not predicable or concrete because they are in a constant state of renewal.

Cultural Socialization

Dramaturgical analysis advances a slightly different interpretation of socialization. Most traditional theories of socialization describe it as a process that fuses an individual to the narrow features of a specific culture. Dramaturgical analysis expands on the concept of socialization to include an extensive collection of social interactions that facilitate individual development across cultures, not within or because of a culture. Instead of considering socialization as an essence that is mysteriously imposed upon an individual, the dramaturgical theorist views socialization as an outcome of active engagement in social activities. The fact that we exist in a multicultural world makes culture specific socialization impossible to achieve. This epistemological viewpoint that interaction is an important force in socialization is problematic to some, as outcomes are not predictable. But since life is not predictable, can it be accurately assessed with a method that is predictable?

Dramaturgical analysis adds an important dimension to the assessment protocol because it is suitable for individuals who are not adequately served by standardized, time sensitive, mainstream-focused, language-specific techniques. There are no culturally derived stereotypes for individual classification because people are considered products of social interaction. While dramaturgical analysis relies on cultural relativity to establish acceptance within and among cultures, it does not impose

cultural identity on individuals. This variation on relativity removes cultural restraints from individuals and allows them freedom to explore significance across cultures. And, the process of socializing with others creates situations that encourage individuality and understanding through interaction.

People learning a new language may be better served by dramaturgical analysis because it offers a process for sharing personal history without concern for understanding predetermined questions stated in an unfamiliar language. This is a more meaningful way to assess people from other cultures because questions are not standardized to mainstream cultural parameters. Indeed, as we become more global, we may work with people who do not use a written language, or who prefer to express themselves through story telling. Dramaturgical analysis is a celebration and acknowledgment of cultural differences as it provides a means for helping individuals integrate into other cultures while retaining their individual identities. Use of the narrative also helps practitioners keep in mind the important influence of others in our lives as we explore social relations that have influenced us. Engaging in a narrative with a client helps us form a deeper understanding of our personal story and how it intersects with others.

Motivation

Try to define motivation without using examples. Most likely, this will prove difficult because, according to dramaturgical theorists, motivation is not a mysterious force that is carried within individuals. Now, try to explain three factors that motivate you. It is easier to describe what motivates you because you are describing concrete expectations. According to dramaturgical theorists, these expectations are not driven by interests, values or personality characteristics. Instead, they develop as individuals interact with significant others in varying degrees of intensity. These interactions may be considered life roles that emerge through interaction with significant others over a lifespan.

As symbols become a narrative of daily life, personal meaning is discovered in the many roles that people occupy in constantly shifting permutations across their lifespan. Consider the metaphor of an actor performing before an audience and how it might apply to the career assessment process. The audience is the facilitator and the actor is the client. Understanding unfolds as performance forms a connection to the many identities or life roles that are created as the individual interacts in social settings. The actor and audience become equal partners in the drama as roles are considered and rearranged. The catalyst for this method is carefully selected job interview questions.

Application of Theory to Practice

While there are many useful interview questions that are suitable for dramaturgical analysis, the following list of questions has proven to be the most useful, given my experiences over the past ten years. Each question is versatile because it results in suggestions about abilities, values, lifestyle choices, skills and other important considerations. It is helpful to arrange for the client to write out answers to each question before discussing them in a two way narrative. This makes the understanding more concrete to the person, helps improve writing skills, and leaves the person with edited responses that can be revised over time as life roles change.

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What do you see yourself doing five years from now, and as a follow up, ten years from now.
3. What three things are most important for you in a job?
4. Describe your ideal life situation.
5. Tell me about a major problem you encountered and how you solved it.
6. What are your strong points? What are your weak points?

The answers given to these questions suggest additional questions for discussion and clarification. As the discussion unfolds, values, abilities, interests and other important information emerges. If necessary, the information may be verified by career assessment, Or, if the information seems comprehensive enough, it may be taken at face value.

Summary

- Dramaturgical analysis is a narrative-based style of career and lifestyle assessment that adds an interpretative dimension to traditional trait-factor assessment. The multi-tasking feature of this approach offers an efficient method for increased efficiency during these lean times when many of us are faced with mandates to accomplish more with fewer resources.
- Dramaturgical analysis adds an important dimension to the assessment protocol because it is suitable for individuals who are not adequately served by standardized, time sensitive, mainstream-focused, language-specific assessments.
- The concept of personality is not a valid construct in dramaturgical analysis because it is considered an internal force that defines individual traits, and initiates actions and decisions. Instead, the concept *SELF* is used as it suggests a changing entity that is

established, destroyed, and recreated through social interaction.

- Socialization as it is derived from a dramaturgical point of view is not culture-specific. Instead it is an ongoing process that celebrates individual differences instead of cultural uniformity. Therefore, rather than considering socialization as an essence that is mysteriously imposed upon an individual, the dramaturgical theorist views socialization as an outcome of active engagement in social activities. This variation on the process of socialization expands to include an extensive collection of social interactions that bring about individual development across cultures, not within or because of a culture.
- Motivation is not driven by interests, values or personality characteristics. Instead, motivation develops as individuals interact with significant others in varying degrees of intensity. These interactions result in life roles that fluctuate and recycle over a person's life span in varying degrees of intensity.
- The catalyst for moving dramaturgical analysis from theory to practice is carefully selected job interview questions. A group of six questions that have proven useful over a number of years is offered as a starting point. As the questions are discussed, new insights are developed that suggest interests, values, abilities, lifestyle preferences, career maturity and other important features for additional consideration and elaboration.

Conclusion

As people engaged in the career counseling community, our challenge is to constantly search for new methods to help us understand the people we seek to help. At the same time, it is imperative to honor time tested theories and assessments that have given us the best practices throughout the lifespan of our profession. It is important to emphasize that career assessment does not need to embrace either conventional or narrative-based techniques. Like the people we seek to serve, the assessment choices at our disposal are diverse and they are limited only by our desire to seek new techniques for more meaningful assessment.

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